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ABSTRACT

This practicum addressed the low self-esteem, poor academic achievement, strained interpersonal relationships, and difficulty in dealing with growing diversity noted in fifth-graders in an urban elementary school. A six-part solution strategy was developed that emphasized: (1) building realistic self-esteem; (2) increasing cultural and ethnic awareness; (3) enhancing cooperative learning; (4) teaching conflict resolution; (5) improving language arts; and (6) presenting opportunities for students to share their talents with others. These strategies were implemented over a 12-week period through various classroom activities and individualized projects. Academic achievement, discipline problems, and growth in self esteem were evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the program. It was found that student achievement scores were significantly higher for the fifth-graders exposed to the intervention than for the previous year's fifth-graders. In-school and out-of-school suspensions among fifth-graders decreased 19 percent from the previous year. Student self-esteem increased significantly over the course of the intervention. (Three appendixes contain self-esteem questionnaires, a sample individual action plan, and a sample individual action lesson plan. Contains 17 references. (MDM)

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ED 380 206

Improving Academic Achievement and Interpersonal Relationships among Diverse 5th Graders by Strengthening Self-Image and Teaching Conflict Resolution Skills

by

Judith Schefkind Gross

Cluster 53

A Practicum I Report Submitted to the Ed. D. Program in School Management and Instructional Leadership in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

1994

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This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Judith Schefkind Gross under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in School Management and Instructional Leadership in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

11/3/94
Date of Final Approval of Report

William W. Anderson
William W. Anderson, Ph. D., Advisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A thesaurus does not contain enough synonyms to describe how special Dr. William W. Anderson, my advisor, has been. He gave me the freedom to change horses in midstream even though he knew that I was probably making a mistake. He was there to help me when I nearly missed a deadline because of my decision. Without his input, kindness, and encouragement, I never would have made it.

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ABSTRACT

Improving Academic Achievement and Interpersonal Relationships among Diverse 5th Graders by Strengthening Self-Image and Teaching Conflict Resolution Skills. Gross, Judith S., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in School Management and Instructional Leadership. Self-Esteem/Cultural Awareness/Cooperative Learning/Conflict Resolution/Student Responsibility/Cultural Interrelationships/Self-Actualization.

Low self-esteem, poor academic achievement, strained interpersonal relationships, and difficulty in dealing with growing diversity were the problems addressed in this practicum.

A six-pronged solution strategy consisting of: (a) building realistic self-esteem, (b) increasing cultural and ethnic awareness and appreciation, (c) cooperative learning, (d) conflict resolution, (e) emphasis on language arts, and (f) providing opportunities for children to share their talents with others was utilized in an attempt to improve the situation.

Standardized achievement test scores increased while incidents of serious behavioral infractions decreased. Although quantitative measures did not show large gains in self-concept, pupil portfolios were more promising. Student generated projects and products offer simple practical ways to build self-esteem in the classroom. The ideas can be modified to meet the needs of any group.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

Poverty, violence, dysfunctional families, and shrinking diversity are the hallmarks of the school system in the state's largest and poorest city where the writer is employed as a teacher of gifted and talented students in grades 4, 5, and 6. Once a thriving industrial center and port, the city has fallen victim to the decline of Communism and a lengthy recession which have rendered the "arsenal of America" into a graveyard dotted with the ruins of abandoned factories. Pawnshops, discount stores, and fast food outlets are all that are left on a once thriving Main Street. Shoppers have deserted the city for nearby suburban malls. White-collar workers stream into the city at 9:00 a.m. to report to jobs at the remaining banks and offices. They depart at 5:00 p.m. turning the streets over to the homeless, prostitutes, drug dealers, gangs, criminals, and senior citizens existing on limited incomes who live in small subsidized apartments carved from two large hotels that are relics of a bygone era.

A dwindling tax base had driven property taxes up so high, that many people have sold their homes for a loss and fled to the surrounding suburbs, leaving behind those who cannot afford to join them. There are still scattered upper and middle-class neighborhoods; but for the most part, the city belongs to the poor.

There are 28 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 4 high schools to serve the 20,462 youngsters who attend public school in the city. In an effort to stem "white flight" and attract a more diverse student population, the city has developed four magnet schools for students in grades K through 8. The first of these schools stresses basics. A second concentrates on average and above average students. Multi-cultural awareness and appreciation are the themes of the third magnet. The newest school is designed with the working family in mind and is opened from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. While other more affluent school districts in the state have discontinued services for the gifted, the city is in the process of expanding their program. In addition to three traditional intellectually gifted classes where students receive services for one full day per week, the city runs two bilingual Talented and Gifted (TAG)

programs based on the "revolving door" model developed by Dr. Joseph Renzulli of the University of Connecticut. In this model, the top 20% of the student body in each host school becomes part of the talent pool. Different members of the talent pool rotate into and out of the gifted program to work on specific projects. Other special needs students are serviced by a variety of programs for the learning disabled and the intellectually, emotionally, and physically challenged. These programs are housed in buildings all over the city.

At the high school level, students are provided with opportunities to develop specific talents or explore vocational interests. There are academically accelerated programs plus performing arts, secretarial, and health service magnets. This fall, the city opened the Aquaculture High School which takes advantage of the nearby water.

Despite all of these efforts, the school system remains primarily minority. African-Americans comprise 40.84% of the student body. Another 43.05% is of Hispanic extraction. Caucasians make up 12.39%. There are 2.98% Asians while .71% is classified as other.

Work Setting and Role

The writer's 719 pupil K through eight grade school is located in a middle-class neighborhood close to the line that separates the city from its more affluent suburban neighbors. The student body consists of 164 children of African-American origin, 227 Hispanics primarily of Puerto Rican descent, 275 Caucasians, and 53 Asians. The school is one of the few in the city with such a large concentration of white students. This is because grades K through 4 are composed mainly of neighborhood children.

The school becomes increasingly diverse at the fifth grade level with the addition of African-American children bused from a housing project on the other side of the city and Hispanic students bused from throughout the entire westside to the bilingual program which is housed in the building. The student body of the middle school is also expanded to include several classes of the intellectually gifted and the emotionally and mentally challenged.

The four different factions: (a) neighborhood children, (b) African-Americans, (c) Hispanic bilingual students, and (d) special education classes make the

building an administrator's nightmare. The principle and the associate principal walk a fine line attempting to juggle the various interests and priorities of these different groups.

The staff of 48 teachers is composed predominately of white, middle-class, middle aged females and does not reflect the racial make-up of the student body. Thirty-six of the teachers are white. Eight faculty members are African-American while four others are of Hispanic descent. Only 12 of the faculty are male. Forty-three teachers are veteran educators with 10 or more years of classroom experience.

As teacher of the intellectually gifted, the writer is responsible for developing, implementing, revising, and teaching the curriculum of 52 students in grades 4-6. All of the students in the gifted program are housed in the school. For four days a week they are members of regular heterogenous classes while the fifth day is spent in the gifted classroom.

In addition to the academic duties cited above, the writer serves as a liaison between regular and special education teachers. As a spokesperson for the gifted program, the writer is responsible for establishing and

maintaining contacts with parents, teachers, administrators, and business groups in the city and throughout the state serving as an advocate for the gifted if warranted.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROGRAM

Problem Description

There was a sharp drop in the scores on standardized tests between the 4th and 5th grades and an increase in the numbers of suspensions and behavioral problems referred for administrative mediation. There was also a drop in the scores on state mastery tests which are administered at the beginning of the 4th, 6th, and 8th grades.

Many changes occurred at the fifth grade level. The most noticeable was the growth in student population. There were 59 pupils housed in two classrooms at the fourth grade level. Most of these children came from the middle-class neighborhood immediately surrounding the school. The 18 children in the gifted program, who joined the student body in the fourth grade, came from feeder schools all over the western half of the city and formed the largest group of non-neighborhood children. As the student population expanded, the racial and ethnic composition of the pupils became increasingly diverse. There was an increase of 19 African-Americans, 35 Hispanics, and 3 Asians at the fifth grade level.

The transition from 4th to 5th grade was also marked by an increase in the number of referrals to the office for behavioral problems. Sixteen students in the fourth grade were sent to the principle. That number grew to 79 in the fifth grade. There was a corresponding increase in the number of in-school suspensions from 3 in the 4th grade to 49 in the 5th grade. This trend continued with out-of-school suspensions rising from 0 at the 4th grade level to 34 in 5th grade.

The fifth grade teachers reported that they experienced a great deal of difficulty in molding their classes into a cohesive group. These problems persisted throughout the school year diminishing somewhat as the children had an opportunity to know one another better.

Some form of structured intervention appeared to be needed to make the transition to fifth grade a smoother one. The problems of increased conflict and poor academic achievement emanating from weak self-esteem and a concomitant low regard for others, especially those who were racially and ethnically different, needed to be recognized and dealt with.

Problem Documentation

There was both quantitative and qualitative evidence that a problem existed at the fifth grade level in the writer's school. To qualify for remedial help in mathematics or reading, children must score at or below the 25th percentile on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT). The mean percentile of fourth grade students on the MAT was 73% with 9% of the students scoring at or below the 25th percentile. In the fifth grade, 37% of the students scored at or below the 25th percentile and were candidates for remediation. The mean percentile for all fifth graders dropped 39 points to 43%.

There was also an increase at the fifth grade level in the number of students referred to the office for administrative intervention in the mediation of classroom behavioral problems. During the 1992-1993 school year, 16 fourth graders were sent to the principal's office while administrators handled 79 problems at the fifth grade level. Recurring discipline problems resulted in 3 in-school suspensions and 0 out-of-school suspensions for fourth grade students during 1992-1993. This number grew to 49 in-school and 34 out-of-school suspensions for fifth graders during the same time period.

During visits to the fifth grade classrooms that housed the gifted students during most of the week, the writer observed many children exhibiting negative, disruptive behavior and showing open hostility to both their teachers and their classmates. Informal interviews with 4th, 5th, and 6th grade teachers revealed that behavioral and academic problems escalated at the fifth grade level and then appeared to gradually diminish. Conversations with gifted students in the writer's fifth grade class disclosed that students, regardless of their own ethnicity, were concerned with getting along with their classmates. They were experiencing problems and were fearful about strained interpersonal relationships.

Causative Analysis

The transformation in socialization, economics, and demographics has had a negative effect on the self-esteem of poor urban children that has impacted on achievement and interpersonal skills. Violence is commonplace. The writer's city led the state with 62 homicides during 1993. Over 65% of fifth grade students reported that they have had friends and relatives who have been the victims of violent crime. The number of children

residing in one parent families headed by females increased from 25% in the 4th grade to 60% in the 5th grade. These youngsters were more likely to be poor than children from intact families (National Commission on Children, 1991).

Of the 59 students in the fourth grade, 38 resided in the middle-class neighborhood surrounding the writer's school. Fifteen of the remaining fourth graders were members of the gifted program and were bused into the school from many different areas in the city's western half. The remaining six children in the fourth grade were younger siblings of TAG pupils. These children were accepted as controlled transfers because their ethnicity added to the diversity of the student body.

There were 58 new pupils added to the school population at the fifth grade level. Of these 58 children, 41 came from either low-income subsidized housing project or the neighborhood immediately surrounding it in the eastern half of the city. The school located nearest to their homes housed pupils K through 4th grade. In the fifth grade, these children were reassigned and bused to the writer's middle school.

The remaining 17 fifth grade students were bilingual pupils from throughout the western half of the city who were bused in for special programs.

The professional staff in the school was least prepared and qualified to meet the needs of children who demonstrated insecurity and low self-esteem. The lack of preparation was especially noticeable in the intermediate grades. It was also evident in the middle school where students changed classes and the emphasis was on mastering specific subject matter. Cognitive needs were stressed in these grades while affective skills received less attention.

With this growing emphasis on accountability and the need to master academic material, children had not had the opportunity to learn much about their own cultural backgrounds and were largely unaware of the role that others of their ethnicity had played in the growth of the United States. If children did not know much about their own heritage, it was unrealistic to expect them to understand children who were from different backgrounds.

Racial isolation in many schools in the writer's city had not given students the opportunity to know

members of other cultural, ethnic, and religious groups on an individual basis. All of the 58 new fifth graders in the writer's building came from a school where over 85% of the pupils shared their ethnicity. For these children, school was a new and frightening place filled with students who were different from themselves. In an effort to maintain discipline and provide structure, fifth grade teachers had tended to become increasingly authoritarian. They stressed adherence to the rules rather than trying to get to the root of the problem.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

In the search for excellence and accountability, emphasis has been placed on the "what's" rather than the "who's." The irony of this is that if it were not for the "who's," the children, there would be no need for educators and schools. Children should be our primary concern; yet, because it is easier to measure cognitive learning, most researchers have given the affective domain a wide berth. If we want to discover why children aren't learning in school, why achievement test scores are falling, and why incidents of violence are on the rise, we must study the students themselves and the environments that they come from.

Today's students are an increasingly diverse group who face a multitude of problems that Kagan (1989) identified in his book describing various methods of organizing cooperative learning groups. First, Kagan cites the socialization void caused by the breakdown in family structure and television which contains antisocial content, misleading advertising, and causes further erosion of family communication. The second group of problems mentioned by Kagan is a transformed economy. The United States is moving away from the earlier ages of agriculture and industry into an information managed, people oriented economy. There is a growing trend towards interdependence in manufacturing and a global economy as evidenced by recently signed trade agreements. This process is being fueled by rapid advances in technology and the resulting knowledge explosion. The third area that Kagan touched upon is the transformation in demographics. Greater numbers of students are living in cities; and racial diversity is increasing so rapidly, that we will soon have a "new majority." The "new majority" does not bring the same values, languages, and backgrounds to school as did the "old majority." Schools must recognize the radical changes taking place and

prepare students to be successful, contributing members of a society in flux.

If we are to develop knowledgeable adults who can relate effectively to those around them, as much attention must be paid to designing a curriculum to teach affective skills as is given to cognitive skills. To do this, one must go back to basics in the classic books on self-image that appeared over 25 years ago. Maslow (1968) introduced his self-actualization theory which was based on a needs hierarchy consisting of five types of human needs. Those at the base of the pyramid, lower level needs, must be satisfied first in order for individuals to progress to the next higher level. The natural direction of growth was toward the top of the pyramid which culminated with self-actualization. The five needs identified by Maslow were: (a) physiological necessities consisting of food, water, oxygen, and shelter; (b) safety needs that lead people to avoid pain, escape fear, and seek security; (c) belonging and love, the need to be part of a family or group and to love and be loved in return; (d) self-esteem, the need to feel competent, independent, and worthy; and finally (e) self-actualization, the need to know, understand, create,

and appreciate beauty. Maslow felt that self-concept developed early in life as a result of interaction between children, parents, and significant others. Self-image, according to Maslow, was relatively stable but could be changed by repetitious experiences over a period of time.

Another pioneer in the field of self-image whose work must be considered was Coopersmith (1967). In his book on the origins of self-esteem, Coopersmith identified three critical elements found in the homes of individuals with high self-esteem. Those elements were: (a) the children experienced the kind of love that expressed respect, concern, and acceptance; (b) their parents were significantly less permissive than were the parents of children with lower self-esteem; and (c) the families functioned with a high degree of democracy. Children from these environments perceived a sense of warmth and love, had the security to grow and try new things without an overriding concern about failure, and were respected as individuals. They were encouraged to have ideas and opinions, recognized that there were clear and definite limits within the environment, and were given rules and standards that were reasonable and

consistently enforced. Their families gave them a chance to succeed at their own levels, and accepted them "with no strings attached."

Erikson (1968), another leader in the field of self-esteem, emphasized the importance of developing a healthy personality and attaining ego identity so that a child understood and accepted themselves and the culture that they lived in. Reasoner (1982), while acknowledging that self-image was formed in the home by interaction with significant others, felt that developing self-esteem in children was one of the school's most important functions.

While researchers felt that self-concept was multidimensional and was shaped at an early age by the environment, it could be changed. Maslow (1968) suggested that providing for and consistently reinforcing lower level needs would lead an individual toward the ultimate goal of self-actualization. Like Maslow, Reasoner (1982) concluded that self-esteem was made up of five components that built upon each other. Reasoner's hierarchy consisted of security, selfhood, affiliation, mission, and competence. Silvernail (1987) concurred with the findings of both Maslow and Reasoner stating

that self-concept was a multifaceted hierarchy that was fairly stable and evaluative. Further evidence was added by Purkey and Smith (1982) who found that self-concept was learned in an on-going, dynamic, organized fashion; and that the self was stable taking time to change.

Although self-esteem is shaped at an early age by the environment, other experiences that occur during the developmental process also affect its formation. Coopersmith (1967) found that acceptance and respect played important roles in building self-image. The theory proposed by Rogers (1969) suggested that realness or genuineness were essential elements in creating a sense of security for a child and added another ingredient to the self-image formula. The importance of genuineness and setting realistic expectations, where teachers believed that students could succeed and expected their pupils to learn, has been cited in studies by Good (1982).

While researchers acknowledged that self-esteem began in the home, they felt that it was an acquired attitude; and as such, was subject to change under the proper conditions. If, for all of the reasons that

Kagan (1989) stated in his research, the home was not providing a suitable atmosphere for the development of a positive self-image, it became the job of the school to take over and meet the need.

The research of Maslow (1968) and Reasoner (1982) tell us the order in which to present experiences to children, while Coopersmith (1967) gives us the goals to aim for in creating a nurturing environment. Instead of blaming each other for the failure to many of today's students, the time has come for the school to fill the void by providing sequential activities designed to increase self-esteem, cooperation, and the appreciation of diversity.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and outcomes were projected for this practicum. By encouraging fifth grade TAG students to be introspective, realistically examining their self-concepts, pupils would be able to identify personal strengths and weaknesses and gain greater knowledge about their individual cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These personal strengths and weaknesses would be used as the basis for Individual Action Plans (IAP) that each child carried out in an effort to bring positive change to themselves, their classmates, their school, and their community.

The writer expected that by empowering students to have a positive impact on their environment, each child would strengthen their own self-image. Progress would be made in making the transition to the fifth grade smoother for all students involved.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the practicum were threefold. First, fifth grade TAG students would learn more about themselves. By the end of the implementation period, all 17 students would be able to list five

positive aspects of their personalities that they had identified and prioritize these characteristics in a rank order list. From this list, the TAG students would be able to name two or more specific ways that they could put this new knowledge to practical use. TAG pupils would also be able to identify their own individual strengths and weaknesses thus developing a more realistic sense of self. At the end of the practicum period, 15 of the 17 TAG students in the fifth grade would be able to add three or more positive attributes to their list of strengths and design an action plan to work on personal weaknesses.

Once the children had had an opportunity to start down the road to self-discover, they would next be encouraged to explore family relationships and to investigate their own ethnic origin. All fifth grade TAG students would be able to identify the continent or country of their family's national origin, list two persons who shared their cultural heritage, and tell about those persons' contributions to the growth and development of humankind.

The third set of expected outcomes dealt with people outside the sphere of the student's families.

All of the fifth grade TAG students would be able to identify two things that made each of their classmates and their teacher special. TAG pupils would use this list of strengths to find two classmates who could help them work on improving their own perceived weaknesses.

Teachers in the four classrooms that housed the TAG students were encouraged to participate in any of the activities carried out by the gifted class that they felt would be of use to their students. All fifth graders participated in a structured course on conflict resolution, an important life skill. By giving children a viable alternative to confrontation, the number of referrals to the office and the number of students suspended would decrease.

Measurement of Outcomes

When attempting to improve self-esteem and reduce conflict, results did not appear overnight. Research indicated that change would come gradually by repeated exposure to positive reinforcers. During the 12 week practicum, both quantitative and qualitative measures were applied to see if there was a gradual trend towards improvement. The writer studied the results of the pre-project self-image questionnaires to identify students

with weak self concepts. The cumulative records of these students were checked to see if they had experienced behavioral problems or interpersonal difficulties in the past. The writer contacted the child's homeroom teacher to discuss the student's behavior and peer relations in the regular classroom. If the teacher reported that the pupil was having difficultly, the school guidance counselor, social worker, and in-school suspension teacher were contacted by the writer to see if they could provide additional anecdotal information. Individual conferences were set up with those students who appeared to have weak self-esteem or whose pre-practicum inventories revealed great discrepancies between how children perceived of themselves and how they thought others saw them. Pupils were encouraged to talk about their feelings and to find ways of building a more positive self-concept. The journals of these students were closely monitored to detect changes in self-perception. The writer compared student scores on pre and post project measures of self-image. The number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions were also considered.

Qualitative data was gathered through informal

observation, questionnaires, work samples, video tapes, and media coverage of the two Saturday workshops planned by students and teachers. Informal discussions were held with the classroom teachers and specialists who worked with the fifth grade TAG students to detect problems and monitor progress. Each pupil kept a portfolio that contained all of the work completed during the implementation period. Students, teachers, and administrators were asked for feedback and were given the opportunity to make suggestions and propose changes to improve the project.

Quantitative information was derived by examining the scores fifth grade pupils on the MAT. These scores were compared to those of last year's fifth grade students who did not take part in the project. Since fifth grade students do not take state mastery tests, there was no way of measuring any gains made in test scores. This comparison will not be able to be made until the fifth graders who took part in the practicum project take the state mastery tests at the beginning of sixth grade.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Investigation into the problem of decreased academic achievement and increased conflict at the fifth grade level in the writer's school suggested several possible solution strategies. The relationship of self-esteem to the learning process has been well documented in educational research. Hierarchies of affective needs were developed by Maslow (1968), Reasoner (1982), and Borba (1989). Although each researcher's blueprint for structuring self-image gave different names to the various levels of the hierarchy, there was consensus that survival and safety needs mst be met first before building toward the goal of fulfillment of self actualization.

Breakdown in traditional family structure; rapidly growing rates of illegitimacy; the rise in the number of working mothers; growing poverty among children; and violence in the media, the home, and the neighborhood have resulted in more children who have not had the chance to develop a sense of security and trust. For this to occur, Borba (1989) proposed that children be exposed to a series of structured, sequential activities

that created an atmosphere of security and trust. An atmosphere where students felt safe and comfortable because they understood the rules and limits, knew what was expected of them, an had people that they could depend on.

Although the process of developing self-esteem started at an early age in the home and was determined by how the parents and significant others viewed the child, it was not written in stone. It could be changed by providing an environment that accepted and respected the child (Coopersmith, 1967). Rogers (1969) stressed the importance of honesty and reality in creating a secure atmosphere for children. Building an inflated sense of personal esteem was a self-defeating mechanism that, when exposed to the harsh light of day, only served to reinforce prior opinions of worthlessness.

Once physical needs had been met and a sense of security developed, it was important to work on creating affiliation where youngsters experienced a sense of belonging (Powers, Clark, Lapsley, & Daniel, 1992). In an era marked by growing cultural diversity where technology brings the world to our doorstep, every

individual must develop pride not only in themselves and their own ethnic group; but also must be made to feel part of a larger group of people from other backgrounds. Knowledge of one's self and one's ethnicity must be balanced by the realization that despite individual differences, all people are members of the human race. As human beings, we share many similarities that make all of us members of the same family--humankind.

When designing activities for children, Corno and Rohrkemper, (1985) stressed the importance of having short as well as long term goals. These goals should be perceived as meaningful by the children so that they would be more likely to master them (Brophy, 1987). To do this, Ames (1992) suggested the use of variety, diversity, and challenge as the key elements in creating an interest in learning.

Since Shermis, (1991) felt that there appeared to be a link between poor reading ability and lack of self-esteem; and to counteract this, emphasis should be placed on language arts activities, this information should be considered when drawing up an action plan. Knapp, Shields, and Patrick (1990) shed more light on the situation stressing the importance of combining

reading, writing, and oral expression in an integrated rational manner rather than dealing with them in an isolated fashion.

According to Kagan (1989), cooperative learning was one of the most effective tools in a teacher's arsenal for increasing security, developing a sense of self, and building affiliation within a group. Through his research, Kagan (1989) found that cooperative learning had four major benefits. First, it lead to academic gains especially for minority and low achieving students. Second, it improved relations among students in integrated classrooms. Third, there was a positive impact on social and affective development. Fourth, it was most successful when used in conjunction with competitive and individualistic classroom structures to prepare students for the full range of social situations. McCarthy (1991) also endorsed cooperative learning but added an additional element, teacher sensitivity, which he felt was necessary before a classroom could become a center of cultural understanding and emancipation.

The issue of sensitivity and the need for teacher reeducation in dealing with urban youngsters from

culturally diverse backgrounds was also stressed by Greenberg (1992). She felt that the first step in creating a classroom where all children are valued was for teachers to stop being culturally assaultive. Once the teacher had examined their own behavior and eliminated any problems, they must make sure that every student understood that erroneous, insulting, discriminatory behavior would not be tolerated in their classroom. To make classrooms inclusive rather than exclusive, Greenberg (1992) suggested starting with the study of every child's family and then proceeding to the group to which the child belonged.

Description of Selected Solution

In addition to providing repeated opportunities to improve self-concept by building security and selfhood through a variety of individual and cooperative multidisciplinary learning experiences, affiliation was increased by a thorough investigation into each child's cultural heritage. Prior to the practicum, the students completed interest and learning style inventories. The results of these measures raised the level of the pupil's knowledge and helped the writer form groups to utilize each child's strengths to the best advantage.

The inventory results were also used to design a wide variety of interdisciplinary activities that appealed to the interests that the students had identified.

Efforts were made to include other fifth graders by exposing all classes to a structured course on conflict resolution. The writer attempted to draw others into the project by sharing activities with interested classes. With the help of the fifth grade TAG students, cooperative learning techniques and lessons on self-esteem were taught to those who wanted them.

Parents were enlisted to become partners with thier children in learning more about their own family's background. Invitations were sent home inviting family members into the classroom to share their knowledge of their heritage with others. The school media specialist and the head Children's Librarian for the city were contacted and asked to help students gain access to books about their cultural heritage. Students learned more about themselves and the people in their community through guest speakers who visited the school to share their histories and accomplishments with the class.

A visit to "Kid's Bridge," a traveling interactive exhibit at a local museum was used to introduce students

to the rich cultural diversity that exists in our city. The writer elicited corporate support so that all fifth graders in the school had free transportation to the museum that hosted the "Kid's Bridge" exhibit. The field trip served as a springboard to encourage the teachers and students in the writer's school to develop and present two Saturday "hands-on" workshops at the museum. These workshops highlighted the contributions of African-Americans and Latin-Americans to the growth of our city. Under the mentorship of a school volunteer, four teams of TAG students were trained in interviewing and video techniques. These teams documented the development of two Saturday workshops and were on hand to film them for the museum's archives.

By providing a wide variety of multidisciplinary, "hands-on" projects with both short and long term goals; giving students the opportunity to work on their own and cooperatively in small and large groups; and attempting to create a sense of ownership by making students, parents, and teachers shareholders in the learning process; the writer tried to improve self-images and interpersonal relationships among fifth grade TAG students.

Report of Action Taken

Building an implementation plan was like constructing a new home--first, the foundation was laid. Many steps were taken prior to implementation. The writer spoke with the fifth grade teachers to elicit their cooperation and participation in a formal conflict resolutions program. Information about the practicum project was shared with the teachers and they were invited to join in any of the planned esteem building activities that they felt might be useful to their pupils. Next, all fifth grade TAG students completed interest and learning style inventories that helped them to discover more about themselves. The results of these inventories were useful to the writer in organizing cooperative learning groups that maximized each child's strengths. Once this was done, fifth grade TAG students were introduced to cooperative learning techniques and had an opportunity to practice them. Children also learned about problem solving tactics and the steps involved in drawing up and implementing an action plan.

The writer contacted the school media specialist and head Children's Librarian at the public library to acquaint them with the project and to ask for their

help. Letters were sent to the parents explaining the project and inviting them to come to school to share information about their cultural heritage with the class. The School Volunteer Association office was contacted to see if they could help locate speakers. The volunteer office was also asked to suggest names of mentors who could assist in teaching video techniques and interviewing skills to the TAG students.

The writer volunteered to serve as a member of the steering committee for the "Kid's Bridge" exhibit that was on display at the local history museum from December 27, 1993 to March 27, 1994. Corporate sponsors recruited by the writer provided busing so that all fifth grade students had free transportation to the exhibit. Other teachers in the building were encouraged to bring their classes to the museum and four others availed themselves of the opportunity.

Teachers in the writer's school were invited to a breakfast in the TAG room to acquaint them with the "Kid's Bridge" concept and to see if they were willing to help plan the Saturday workshops on African-American and Latin-American contributions to the city. The museum was contacted so that firm dates could be set up.

The projected time line for the practicum was 12 weeks. The first three weeks concentrated mainly on creating a sense of security. Journal writing was used as the vehicle to initiate the project and to open up the channels of communication between students and teachers. Through the journals, the writer had the opportunity to establish and reaffirm acceptance of and respect for the thoughts and ideas of each student. The diaries gave pupils a chance to practice writing skills and made language arts more meaningful by relating topics to real life and personal experiences. During the first week of the project, fifth grade TAG students discussed the role of a diary and the reasons for keeping such documents. Pupils read entries from historical diaries thus acquainting themselves with primary sources and compared what they had read to the same events recorded in secondary sources. Directions for bookbinding were distributed and pupils made their own journals and decorated them. In the beginning, the writer suggested topics to stimulate the students. As the project progressed, many students chose to ignore the writing prompts and selected their own topics to write about. Youngsters exchanged their diaries with the writer who

read them and responded to the entries. Diaries were kept for the first month of the practicum.

The second week of the practicum concentrated on utilizing the cooperative learning techniques that had been learned earlier in the year. Children met in groups to reevaluate the rules that governed the class. Pupils established methods for dealing with rule breakers. Empowering the children made them more likely to follow agreed upon procedures. The writer's role as a facilitator was strengthened and students took more responsibility for their own learning and behavior.

In the third week, pupils increased their sense of security by playing a series of cooperative games with their TAG classmates. The children went back to their regular classrooms and shared what they had learned with their fellow students.

The major thrust of the 4th, 5th, and 6th weeks was to develop a realistic sense of self. Minor emphasis was placed on reinforcing security needs. In the course of this process, parents and relatives were drawn into the project as they helped their children to investigate their cultural heritage. By making families partners in the learning process, children strengthened their own

sense of personal esteem through a renewed sense of acceptance by significant others. As students learned about their classmates on a more personal level, pupils began to focus on similarities and started to look beyond external differences.

Week four involved activities designed to make children explore their attitudes and emotions. Through movies, role playing, and sociodrama, students were able to explore various solutions to problems discussing the merits and weaknesses of each. All fifth graders visited the "Kid's Bridge" exhibit to learn more about the various groups of people who live in the city.

During the fifth week of the practicum, pupils were encouraged to focus on their own strengths and the things that made them unique. Children prepared their presents for a "Gift of Me" party. Pictures, objects, or words representing personal strengths and abilities were put into a box and the box was wrapped up to resemble a birthday present. These presents were brought to a "Gift of Me" party. At the party each student unwrapped their gift and talked about some of the talents and interests that made them special. The children recorded the list of gifts and their donors.

The list was placed in their portfolios and used later in the practicum to help pupils select team members for cooperative learning groups.

The sixth week was devoted to an in depth study of each child's family background. Pupils interviewed family members to learn more about their genealogy. Each child was asked to share a special story about something that actually happened to them or to a member of their family. Parents were invited to class to listen to the children and to share a story of their own if they choose to do so.

The final six weeks of the implementation period focused on affiliation while continuing to reinforce security and self-esteem. Individual Action Plans were the theme of week seven. Children analyzed their strengths to see how they could be used to help others in their class, family, school, or community. Each child started to follow through on their action plan before the end of the practicum period. At this point, youngsters started organizing the activities that would be presented at the two Saturday workshops. Video teams, under the guidance of a mentor, were selected to film each workshop and team members began compiling lists of questions to

ask the participants.

Week eight concentrated on the identification of personal weaknesses and the steps that could be taken to eliminate them. Children were encouraged to examine the "Gift of Me" lists to see if any of their classmates could serve as resources to help them improve. In this practical way, the fifth grade TAG class was introduced to the concept of networking.

The ninth week marked the beginning of the month of "Positive Power." Each day during the month, children did or said something positive that brightened another student's day. Pupils kept track of their deeds by recording them on a calendar.

The final three weeks were devoted to working on the activities for the Saturday workshops and starting the projects outlined in the IAP.

At the end of the twelfth and final week, all fifth grade TAG students completed the same self-esteem inventories that were administered at the inception of the project. Children were asked to fill out evaluation forms. The writer examined all of the materials in the fifth grade TAG students' portfolios. The information gained from feedback by the participants and evaluation

by the writer will be used to revise and improve the project for next year's group.

CHAPTER V

The problem addressed in this practicum was the increase in serious discipline problems requiring administrative intervention and the sharp drop on standardized achievement test scores that occurred at the fifth grade level in the writer's large urban school. A six-pronged solution strategy was utilized. This strategy consisted of: (a) building realistic self-esteem, (b) increasing cultural and ethnic awareness and appreciation, (c) introducing and practicing cooperative learning techniques, (d) teaching conflict resolution skills, (e) integrating language arts and reading skills in a personal meaningful manner, and (f) providing opportunities for each participant to have a positive impact on their environment.

Results

Seventeen students in the writer's fifth grade TAG program were exposed to all six of the elements contained in the solution strategy. The remaining 77 youngster from the fifth grade were exposed to only one portion of the solution strategy, a structured course on conflict resolution. Three areas: (a) academic achievement, (b) the number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions,

and (c) growth in self esteem were evaluated to determine the effectiveness of this project.

Academic growth was measured by comparing MAT scores for fifth graders who participated in this year's practicum project with the scores of last year's fifth graders who received no intervention. There was a +4 growth rate in reading with the mean score moving from 44% in 1993 to 48% in 1994. Gains in mathematics were even more encouraging. Pupils moved from a mean score of 36% in math during 1993 to a score of 52% in 1994--an increase of +16.

The number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions at the fifth grade level was used to measure the success of interpersonal relationships. A comparison was made between the number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions that occurred this year during the implementation of the practicum with the number of suspension recorded last year. During 1993, the fifth grade teachers referred 79 youngsters to administrators because of serious infractions of school rules. Forty-nine of these pupils were assigned to the in-school suspension class while 34 others received out-of-school

suspensions as a punishment. The number of referrals to the office for administrative intervention during 1994 decreased to 64. Thirty-eight pupils were assigned to the in-school suspension class while 26 others received out-of-school suspensions. This marked an almost 19% drop in the number of serious behavioral problems that could not be handled in the classroom.

Changes in self-esteem were charted by comparing the results of three writer constructed attitude inventories that were administered prior to the implementation of the practicum and again after the project's completion. Very little change was noted between the scores on the first part of the three inventories. This section consisted of 25 pairs of antonyms that described various personality traits. The characteristics were graded on a Likert scale by a line segment divided into five equal parts. The largest increases occurred on item 10 which paired the adjectives "special" and "ordinary," item 13 which used the antonyms "generous" and "stingy," item 16 which contrasted the words "doer" and "watcher," and item 17 which consisted of the terms "giver" and "taker." All 17 participants viewed themselves in a more positive

light on these items after the completion of the practicum. Ten youngsters rated themselves at least 20% closer to the positive antonym at the end of the implementation period.

The most significant differences occurred on the remaining portion of the inventory which asked youngsters to select 5 adjectives that described them best and then narrow this list down to the 1 adjective that was the most like them. On the pre-practicum inventory, 10 fifth grade TAG students listed 5 positive and 5 negative personal characteristics and were able to identify 3 or 4 positive and negative personality traits. Of the 5 children in this group, only 4 youngsters narrowed the list to 1 word that was most representative of them. The remaining 2 children only listed 2 adjectives as their personal strengths and weaknesses. These children were unable to select 1 positive and 1 negative word that they felt described them best.

By the end of the implementation period, 14 participants completed the remaining portion of the inventory and were able to identify 5 positive and 5 negative aspects of their personality. The 14 were able

to select 1 trait that described them best. The remaining 3 youngsters listed 3 or 4 personal strengths and weaknesses and were able to select 1 adjective that told people more about the positive and negative aspects of their personality. It took 22 minutes for all 17 participants to complete the portion of the pre-practicum self-image inventory that they were able to respond to. At the end of the implementation period, all 17 participants completed the post-practicum inventory in 13 1/2 minutes.

Since it is more difficult to measure self-esteem which lies in the affective domain and does not readily lend itself to quantitative evaluation, a wider spectrum of subjective qualitative methods was applied. These will be mentioned in the discussion section of this chapter.

The primary goal of this practicum was to provide fifth grade TAG students with opportunities and experiences that would enable them to strengthen their self-esteem. By helping pupils to build a more realistic positive sense of self-worth, it was hoped that academic achievement would improve and serious infractions of school rules would decrease. Improved behavior and

grades would generate additional approval from the significant others in youngster's lives. This approval would serve to further reinforce student's self-esteem.

At the conclusion of the practicum period, the writer expected to see both quantitative and qualitative evidence that fifth grade students had developed more positive self-images and that there was a trend towards better grades and more harmonious personal relationships among all fifth graders. Based upon observations and data generated during the implementation phase of the project, most of the desired goals, expectations, and outcomes were attained. In those instances where the results did not meet the writer's expectations, there was a trend toward improvement.

In addition to the goals discussed above, the writer expected to see several specific outcomes occur as a result of the practicum project. The first desired outcome was that all 17 participants would be able to add three or more adjectives to their list of positive personal traits. These results were attained by all of the students. Next, it was hoped that all 17 participants would be able to prioritize their positive

characteristics into a rank order list. By the end of the twelve week period, all of the children could do this.

Another outcome looked for by the writer was that all 17 participants would be able to use their list of positive personal attributes to develop an Individual Action Plan to improve themselves, their families, class, school, or community. This outcome was not attained. Only 14 of the 17 youngsters involved in the project were able to draw up and follow through on an IAP.

The fourth desired outcome was that all 17 children would learn more about their ethnic and cultural heritage identifying the continent or country of the family's origin and naming two people who shared a similar heritage and have contributed to humankind. This result occurred.

The next outcome was also related to diversity. The writer expected that all of the 17 pupils would have a chance to attend the "Kid's Bridge" exhibit at the local history museum to learn more about the ethnic make-up of the community that we live in. This outcome was not attained. Two children were absent on the day of the field trip. Although they received second-hand

information from their classmates, they did not have the full benefit of the experience.

All 17 participants in the practicum took part in preparing for or performing in the two Saturday workshops on African-American and Latin-American appreciation. This fulfilled the sixth desired outcome.

The seventh outcome expected by the writer was that a mentor would be located to train four different teams of children in interviewing and video techniques. This was accomplished.

Another expected outcome was that all 17 participants would be able to name two or more things that made each of their classmates and their teacher special. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Only 13 of the 17 participants achieved the outcome.

The writer was more successful with the ninth outcome, that all 17 participants have a chance to learn and practice cooperative learning techniques. The expected outcome was accomplished. The final outcome, teaching a formal course in conflict resolution to all 94 fifth graders, was also attained.

Discussion

The marked increase in serious discipline

infractions requiring administrative intervention and a sharp drop in standardized test scores at the fifth grade level in the writer's school concerned many of the staff. Investigation revealed that the student population almost doubled between the 4th and 5th grades. The new students added to the diversity of the school's ethnic and racial composition with African-American and Latin-American populations experiencing the most growth. Homeroom teachers in the fifth grade reported that many of the incoming pupils had trouble in establishing cordial interpersonal relations.

Research into the problem disclosed that there was a positive correlation between low self-esteem and poor academic achievement (Shermis, 1991). Many studies suggested that self-concept was hierarchical in nature and that lower level physiological and safety needs must be met before a child could attain self-actualization (Maslow, 1968). The literature stressed the important role of the family in building self-image (Coopersmith, 1967). It suggested that children start the process of strengthening their self-esteem with the study of their nuclear family (Greenberg, 1992). Once students had learned more about their own families, they were ready

to explore the cultural and ethnic roots of their extended families (Greenberg, 1992). When a realistic, positive sense of self was established and youngsters had learned to appreciate their heritage, they were ready to progress to the next step. The next step consisted of learning about others in their class, school, and community whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds were different from their own.

Further reading suggested that more steps must be taken in attempting to improve the problem of low self-esteem, poor interpersonal relationships, and disappointing academic achievement. Cooperative learning was one technique that had been successfully utilized to meet the affective needs of children (Kagan, 1989). Other studies discussed the link between reading ability and self-image (Shermis, 1991). Conflict resolution was touted in other research as an effective tool in counteracting violence.

With this information in mind, the writer devised a solution strategy that combined five elements: (a) building realistic self-esteem, (b) increasing cultural and ethnic awareness and appreciation, (c) introducing and practicing cooperative learning techniques, (d)

teaching conflict resolution skills, and (e) integrating language arts and reading skills in a personally meaningful manner. A sixth element, based on the writer's philosophy of education, was added to the solution strategy. That element was "giving." Most young people seldom have the chance to experience the sense of fulfillment that sharing their time and talents with others brings. By "giving" of themselves, student self-esteem would be enhanced as children realized that they had contributions to make that could improve the life of someone else.

The primary goal of providing fifth grade TAG students with opportunities and experiences that would enhance their self-esteem was divided into three sections. First, students would learn more about themselves and would be able to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses realistically. Second, pupils would investigate their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Third, children would discover more about their classmates and teacher learning to view each person as a unique individual.

At the beginning of the practicum when the participants filled out the three self-image inventories,

the writer noticed reluctance on the part of many students to describe themselves in highly positive terms. Children were able to name their perceived weaknesses with ease but had problems identifying personal strengths and talents. When the writer asked pupils about their hesitation, one child blurted out, "You always told us that just because we're in TAG it doesn't mean that we're better than the other kids. If I put down what I really think about myself, you'll be mad at me!" The writer took time out to discuss the difference between bragging and realistic self-evaluation with the class. Then, the children were given a chance to change their self-image inventories. Many took advantage of the opportunity.

General discomfort on the part of the youngsters in dealing with the positive aspects of their personalities was again evident when the children had to list five or more positive personal traits. "Can't we start with the bad things?" asked one child. That comment prompted the writer to fill a glass half way with water. The pupils were asked to observe the glass very careful and to describe what they saw. A lively debate on optimism versus pessimism ensued. Despite class discussion, 7 of the 17 participants were unable to list four positive

words to describe themselves. By the end of the twelve week implementation period, 14 of the children attained this outcome and all 17 participants were more comfortable with viewing themselves in a positive light.

Although only 14 of the 17 participants achieved the third expected outcome of the project and were able to develop and follow through on an IAP, the writer considered these results the most important part of the entire practicum. Every participant, whether or not they accomplished the outcome, gained valuable knowledge about themself. Those children who succeeded plan to build on their success by continuing their projects next year. Those youngsters who failed can point out the places where they went wrong. The four have rewritten their plans so that things will go more smoothly next year.

A wide range of activities were undertaken by the students as a result of the Individual Action Plans. Two pupils who took private dance lessons volunteered to help with the after school dance program. They choreographed a routine for the second graders that was performed at the June recital. One youngster whose whole live revolved around computers was thrilled to have the opportunity to teach the first graders and their

instructor how to use a new computer that had been recently installed in their classroom. Six other students approached the gym teacher and asked to be assigned to help the kindergartners develop their gross and fine motor skills. After receiving instruction from the physical education teacher, the children reported to the kindergarten on a rotating schedule. They assisted in organizing and teaching games and worked individually with the less coordinated youngsters.

Another child in the fifth grade TAG class decided to develop a mini-course in creative writing for one of the second grade groups. This student contacted the classroom teacher to learn more about objectives, curriculum, lesson plans, and record keeping. At the end of the eight week implementation period, the exhausted frustrated fifth grader reported to the writer, "I never knew how hard it was to teach kids. Now I know how you feel when we don't listen!"

Three other participants who were very artistic decided to use their talents to run a face-painting booth at the birthday celebration of our local history museum. These youngsters gave up an entire Saturday to share their gifts with other children in our city. It was

difficult to decide who was more pleased. the artists or their subjects.

Another student who was very interested in science prepared a series of simple "hands-on" experiments that were shared with a first grade class. The first graders were so enthusiastic that the teacher invited the budding scientist back to present lessons on magnetism and electricity.

A great love of small children led one participant to volunteer as a teacher's aide in the afternoon kindergarten class. The experience was so enjoyable that the child is seriously considering a possible career in early childhood education.

The three participants who failed to achieve the third outcome had a very difficult time deciding what they wanted to do. Their plans were too grandiose to accomplish within the implementation phase of the practicum. They became very frustrated and spent most of the time talking about what they wanted to do instead of actually taking steps to do something. When asked to evaluate themselves, one of the youngsters remarked, "I waited too long to get started. Instead of worrying about what I wanted to do, I wasted time looking at what

everyone else was doing." Spurred on by the success of their classmates, the three have developed workable plans that will be implemented when they return to school in the fall.

The fourth expected outcome, that all 17 participants would learn more about their family heritage and be able to identify two persons from the same background who have made contributions to humankind, bore unexpected dividends. Children shared their backgrounds with the class and told stories about customs, family members, and holidays that made the cultures described more realistic and personal. The students became so involved in this activity that they decided to stage a "Heritage Museum." Pupils selected a noteworthy person to represent their cultural and ethnic background. The did research to learn about the person they had chosen, wrote a speech telling about the subject's life and accomplishments, and recorded their speech on cassette tape. Next, they assembled a costume and designed a pedestal to stand on. Several classes were invited to tour the "Heritage Museum."

Free transportation and food were the catalysts that ensured the success of the next two expected outcomes of

the practicum. Fifth grade teachers were unable to turn down the offer of free busing to the "Kid's Bridge" exhibit. Any chance to enrich the lives of their students without spending their own money was too good to pass up.

The exhibit was wonderful. It was interactive, exciting, and meaningful. It skillfully combined information about all racial groups while highlighting the different people who live in our own city. The teachers were so excited that in their enthusiasm they encouraged several other classes in the building to visit the museum.

When the fifth grade teachers received an invitation to a breakfast in the TAG room, they felt obligated to attend and they persuaded other staff members to join them. At the breakfast, the writer proposed that the students in grades 4-6 come together to organize two Saturday workshops highlighting the contributions of African-Americans and Latin-Americans to our city. At first the reaction to the suggested programs was lukewarm; but as the teachers started brainstorming, the idea began to grow and to gain momentum.

The teachers decided to target both students and

their parents and relatives as the intended audience. Each workshop was divided into two major sections: (a) student performances, and (b) "hands-on" activities.

When the teachers brooched the students with the idea, the children responded enthusiastically. Preparations began immediately. Some of the youngsters worked on plays, puppet shows, poems, songs, and dances. Other students and teachers prepared ethnic crafts and located recipes for traditional foods.

Despite the fact that the workshops were held on Saturday afternoon, both programs were well attended. The "Thumbs-Up" video team, a group of TAG students trained by a mentor in interviewing skill and video techniques, was on hand to film both events. The presence of this team at the events provided evidence that the seventh expected outcome, training a camera team, had been attained.

The workshops produced some unanticipated outcomes. The first occurred during the citywide Latin-American appreciation day. The natural poise, grace, and sense of timing of one youngster made the child stand out from the rest of the dancers. The writer was able to arrange an audition for the student at the regional performing arts

center. The pupil was accepted and will be attending classes in the fall.

The second surprise outcome impacted upon the writer's entire school. The teachers who had participated in the two appreciation days convinced the rest of the faculty and support staff that a schoolwide cultural diversity festival would be a perfect activity to culminate the school year. Each corridor was assigned a different continent to represent and one teacher from each group was selected as captain. Hallways and classrooms were decorated. Dioramas were set up in the auditorium. The aroma of international foods filled the air. Students dressed in ethnic garb, parents, and other community members were on hand to share their heritage with all of the students. The festival was so successful that it will be repeated again next year.

Despite intense effort on the part of the writer, all 17 participants were not able to identify two talents or accomplishments that made each of their classmates and teacher unique. An elaborate "Gift of Me" party was held. Students selected a menu and prepared the food and decorations. Each child brought an attractively wrapped present to the party. The gifts contained pictures,

words, or objects that represented that person's special skills. As the youngsters ate, each child unwrapped their gift, held up the contents of the package, and explained what each thing inside represented. A list of every person's talents was recorded next to their name on the class list.

The cooperative learning segment of the solution strategy produced some very interesting results. After a brief discussion of the meaning of cooperation, the writer asked the students to come up with a method for dividing the class up into groups of four. When this decision was made, the pupils were asked to separate into groups. Each group was given a different problem to solve within a set time limit. At the end of the allotted time, the entire class came back together and the various cooperative learning groups shared their solutions with the others. Only one of the four groups had arrived a a solution. The others spent most of the time socializing or arguing with one another about who should do what. When asked by the writer why the cooperative groups weren't cooperating, no one had an answer. Everyone was busy blaming everybody else for

their failure. After much prompting by the writer, the students realized that they had selected their groups based on friendship and had paid no attention to the problem that had to be solved or the skills that each team member brought to the group. Instead of breaking the task down into smaller parts and assigning each group member a specific role in the group, all of them had tried to do everything at once.

At this point, the writer introduced the class to the various rules, roles and structures suggested by Kagan (1989) in his book on the organization of successful cooperative groups. Once every child knew what part of the problem they were responsible for and understood the role and the importance of that role to the success of the group, cooperative learning was more productive.

With the help of an outside facilitator, the final expected outcome of the practicum was achieved and all 94 fifth grade students were exposed to an eight month structured course on conflict resolution. The biggest problem encountered by the writer was in convincing the principals that conflict resolution would make their jobs easier. Both administrators tend to be authoritarian and

look at change suspiciously as a possible threat to their power base.

Evaluating affective attributes has never been an easy job. In an effort to provide quantitative as well as qualitative information, the writer resorted to MAT scores. While the fifth grades improved in both reading and mathematics, the growth in math was four times that of reading. Since this practicum placed an emphasis on language arts and reading skills, the results were contrary to the expectations of the writer. How much of the growth exhibited by fifth graders can be attributed to the practicum and how much credit must be given to maturation and efforts of the classroom teachers is a matter of conjecture. The same question must be raised when examining the numbers of in-school and out-of-school suspension. What influence did the practicum have on the results? What was the role of the classroom teacher? What part did the facilitator who taught conflict resolution skills play?

The results of the pre and post practicum self-image inventory was disappointing. A more dramatic positive attitude shift was hoped for. Perhaps the writer was overly optimistic. Attitudes are not formed overnight

and take a long period of time to alter (Maslow, 1968). Working with youngsters one day a week for twelve sessions may not be a long enough or a concentrated enough period of time.

While self-image inventory showed no growth on many of the items measured, the writer noticed improvement in the self-esteem of most of the participants. Since the self-image inventory was constructed by the writer and tailored specifically for this practicum, there may be a better commercial instrument on the market that is more sensitive to shifts in attitude.

Videotapes, teacher observations, student and teacher evaluations, and student portfolios and products were the qualitative measures used to determine changes in attitude. Since these methods were subjective in nature, the writer made sure to solicit information from persons not directly involved in the project. Despite this precaution, it was impossible to state that the information gained was free from bias as every human being has been influenced by their own individual background and experiences.

The writer tended to be overly optimistic throughout the practicum by using the word "all" when stating the

expected outcomes. The use of that word to describe an anticipated outcome greatly increased the chance that the outcome would not be achieved because "all" represented one end of the continuum. Most things fall somewhere in-between the words "all" and "none."

Recommendations

The following recommendations would be helpful if this project were to be duplicated in another work setting. First, plan to institute the project at the beginning of the school year before the students have an opportunity to form deeply rooted opinions about their classmates. The longer you wait to start, the harder it will be to achieve your expected outcomes. Since attitudes are formed in the home and are in place before a child even enters school, the writer's second suggestion would be to introduce the project to the children at an earlier age. While younger pupils may not be able to grasp all of the ideas contained in the six strands of the strategy solution, most of the concepts can be modified and made age appropriate.

Another recommendation would be to continue the project for a much longer period of time making the teaching of affective skills a part of the regular

curriculum. In this technological age where today's facts are obsolete tomorrow, teachers must teach their students to accept their individual strengths, to be willing to work to improve their weaknesses, and to relate well to other people. Long after pupils have forgotten many of facts that we have taught them, they will remember and use these important life skills.

The final recommendation would be to make a greater effort to include the parents and all of the adults in the school as partners in the project. Every adult that the participants come in contact with has the power to influence positive change. The more people who buy into your idea, the greater your chance of success.

Dissemination

The project has been disseminated in several ways. The writer has provided any teacher in the building who expressed an interest in what was going on with copies of all of the activities completed by the participants. Videotapes of the African-American and Latin-American appreciation days were donated to the school media center and local history museum by the video team that filmed them.

The writer has had the opportunity to give the

keynote address at a statewide reading conference and was able to share specific activities that dealt with cultural diversity and acceptance with other teachers. Some of the information gained in the esteem building portion of the practicum will be shared at a regional parent conference this fall where the writer has been asked to deliver the keynote address.

Still other activities will be disseminated to master teachers from every state in the union when the writer attends a national conference in the autumn.

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APPENDIX A

THE ME I SEE

The Me I See

I. Look at the words on both sides of the line. They are opposite in meaning. Think about each word. Put an X anywhere along the line at the point that you feel describes your personality best.

1. happy — sad

2. confident — unsure

3. funny — serious

4. popular — unpopular

5. good looking — ugly

6. talkative — quiet

7. smart stupid

_____

8. outgoing shy

_____

9. ambitious lazy

_____

10. special ordinary

_____

11. courteous rude

_____

12. honest dishonest

_____

13. generous stingy

_____

14. interesting uninteresting

15. athletic unathletic

16. doer watcher

17. giver taker

18. curious bored

19. healthy sick

20. relaxed nervous

21. brave scared

_____

22. considerate inconsiderate

_____

23. kind unkind

_____

24. patient impatient

_____

25. loyal disloyal

_____

II. Choose 5 words from either side of the line that you think describe you best. Write them on the lines below.

_____

_____

_____

III. Look at the 5 words you listed in question II. Choose the 1 word that is most like you and write it on the line below.

_____

IV. Choose 5 words from either side of the line that you think are least like you. Write them on the lines below.

_____

_____

_____

V. Look at the 5 words you listed in question IV. Choose the 1 word that is least like you and write it on the line below.

_____

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL ACTION PLAN

INDIVIDUAL ACTION PLAN

1. List at least 6 of your personal strengths.

_____

_____

_____

2. Prioritize your list starting with the gift that you feel is most valuable to you and working toward the gift that you think it the least valuable.

_____

_____

_____

3. Brainstorm all of the different ways that you can use your gifts to help your classmates, your family, your school, or your community. Remember when brainstorming to write down all of your ideas no matter how far fetched they may seem to you.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Look over the list of ideas that you came up with. Put a star in front of the 3 ideas that you like best.

_____

_____

_____

5. Complete the following information for each of the 3 ideas that you selected.

IDEA A

Name of talent or talents used:

_____

Intended Audience:

_____

Where activity will take place:

_____

When activity will take place:

_____

Mentor (person who will help you with the plan)

_____

IDEA B

Name of talent or talents used:

_____

Intended Audience:

_____

5. IDEA B

Where activity will take place:

_____

When activity will take place:

_____

Mentor (person who will help you with the plan):

_____

IDEA C

Name of talent or talents used:

_____

Intended Audience:

_____

Where activity will take place:

_____

When activity will take place:

_____

Mentor (person who will help you with the plan):

_____

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL ACTION LESSON PLAN

INDIVIDUAL ACTION LESSON PLAN

1. Name of student:

_____

2. Name of mentor:

_____

3. Name of talent or talents used:

_____

4. Intended audience:

_____

5. Where activity will take place:

_____

6. When activity will take place:

_____

7. Name of activity:

_____

8. Objective (what you hope will happen):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. Materials needed (things you need to carry out the activity):

10. Procedure (what you do step by step):

11. Despite planning, problems can and do arise when implementing a plan. Brainstorm a list of all of the things that you can think of that may happen to make your activity less successful.

12. Every problem has a solution or solutions. Look at the list of problems you came up with in question 11 and find a solution for each of them.

PROBLEM SOLUTION

13. Observations (what happened when you tried your plan):

14. Evaluation (how the plan worked including its strengths and weaknesses):

15. Revisions (changes you will make when presenting your lesson to a new audience):

15. _____

_____

_____

_____

Upon completion of this plan, have your mentor sign this form and return it to your teacher.

To Whom It May Concern:

_____ has successfully
(name of student)

completed the activity outlined in this lesson plan.

_____ _____
(name of mentor) (date)